

21 December 1963

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RESULTS OF DISCUSSIONS IN SAIGON 18 - 20 December 1963

1. There is no organized government in South Vietnam at this time. The Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) is in control, but strong leadership and administrative procedures are lacking. Reports were received that province and district chiefs do not act because of the lack of direction and orders. Nevertheless, the MRC are confident, feel they are winning the support of the people. They recognize there is a big job ahead but feel it is not insurmountable, and they feel their plan of organization will lead to success. They claim complete understanding among all members, however there is evidence of tension which, if it grows, could lead to serious political difficulties.
2. The Military Revolutionary Committee, MRC, has replaced about 70 percent of the 43 province chiefs and a substantial number of the 253 district chiefs. This replacement program is continuing. Many appointments are reported to be good, some not so good. Why MRC feel that practically all must be replaced.
3. The MRC feel they have reached an understanding with the Hoa Hao and on 27 December will reach agreement with the Cao Dai. These arrangements could substantially improve the security of the Central Highlands, remove CVII factors in Hoa Hao and Cao Dai provinces, provide important information on VC concentrations and activities, and give a significant additional trumpet on the population. The outcome of these arrangements will bear significantly on the future of the CVII.
4. It is abundantly clear that statistics received over the past year or more from the CVII officials and reported by the US mission on which the nature the trend of the war were grossly inaccurate. CVII areas in the Delta and in the areas immediately north of Saigon appear to have been exaggerated and were probably never as good as reported. The Viet Cong control larger percentage of the population, greater proportion of territory, and have destroyed or damaged more strategic targets than expected. Admittedly, this area of South Vietnam has been recognized as the most vicious. Revision of factual data evidences a far greater justification for the CVII in exerting the unfavorable trend and exaggerating the situation than was thought.

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3. Starting in about July, indices on progress of the war turned unfavorable for the OVW. The number of Viet Cong attacks and the focus of strategic junctures to the Viet Cong increased. VC casualties in OVW districts, weapons lost or weapons captured, etc., all turned in favor of the VC and against the OVW. The trend lines were gradual until November the date of the coup, and then turned very sharply against the OVW because of a great increase in number and intensity of VC attacks in the month immediately following the coup.

4. The tempo of VC activities has slowed down. Incidents were fewer during the last week in November and have continued at a lower rate so far in December. Concurrently, the tempo of OVW activities has increased. However, the trend lines of all indices have turned in favor of the OVW in recent weeks, although as no instance has the situation which existed in June or July, 1968, been recovered.

5. There is continuing evidence of infiltration of cadres and small arms from North Vietnam through Laos and across the Laotian border. [redacted] map with embossed [redacted] 25X1 but not precisely known quantities of arms have entered South Vietnam from North Vietnam through Laos this year.

6. Large machine weapons, such as recoilless rifle, mortars, and anti-aircraft guns, and men trained in their use, have appeared in the delta in recent months. It is not known whether they came through Laos and Cambodia and across the border, down the rivers, or by sea. Large weapons have not appeared in the northern sections of South Vietnam.

7. The KRG recognize the seriousness of the problems in the delta and have taken a number of actions which they feel will produce results. However, there is evidence of massive deforestation in the Self-Defense Corps, which must be corrected. Also, there is an urgent need for substantially more organized OVW units in the delta and the provinces around Saigon.

8. The strategic juncture has encountered resistance in the delta because relocation removed families from their fields and homes prepared for garrisoning. Many defections of entire villages were regarded as due to the above reason. The villagers built along the banks of rivers and canals could not be encouraged to defendable compounds without hardship the villages considered unacceptable.

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It is my conclusion that the coup came when there was a demand which was more extreme than was reported and, therefore, more decisive than realized.

The null theory government may be an temporary over the Dien-Bien-Phu region, but this is not yet established and the future of the war remains in doubt.

The Viet Cong are receiving substantial support from North Vietnam and possibly elsewhere, and this support can be increased. Stopping this by sealing the borders, the extensive waterways, and the long coast line is difficult, if not impossible.

The VC appeal to the people of South Vietnam on political grounds has been effective, gained recruits for their armed forces, and won their renditions.

The ability of the CVN to reverse this trend remains to be proven. Much depends on the ability of the ARVC to deploy their forces and pursue the conflict in a manner which will ensure the security of the people and provide them desired freedom, privileges, and some tangible benefits.

The lack of an outstanding individual to lead and absence of administrative experience within the ARVC are ominous factors.

The political stability of the new government under the ARVC is subject to serious doubt. Conflicts of ambition, jealousy, differences of opinion over policy matters are all possible, could develop serious difficulties, perhaps further dissension and coup attempts all of which will affect the war effort against the VC.

Overshadowing the VC movement by the CVN is formidable and difficult, but not impossible. The problem can be compounded by mounting increased support from RVN and political failures by the ARVC. Worse, in my judgment, there are more reasons to doubt the future of the ARVC under present programs and moderate confidence in existing programs (i.e., harassing sabotage against RVN, border crossings, etc.) than there are reasons to be optimistic about the future of our allies in South Vietnam.

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